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ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS

**GARDEN DESIGN STUDY GROUP**

NEWSLETTER No. 29

April/May 2000

Study Group Leader/Editor: Diana SnapeTreasurer/Membership: Peter Garnham

Dear Members,

It's amazing how quickly renewal time comes round. As our financial year runs from July 1 to June 30, all subscriptions for the 2000/2001 year (!) are due by the end of June, before the next Newsletter comes out. We would be very grateful if you would renew your membership promptly - it saves us doing extra work. The renewal form comes with this Newsletter. If you do it now, you can relax!

I'm almost getting used to writing 2000 for the year (and even 00). Unexpectedly I have found that it does seem like a new start, even if the new millenium doesn't *really* begin until next year. I've decided to think of this as the *new millenium year*, so whichever end of the year it occurs doesn't matter - we can celebrate at both.

A list of current members accompanies this NL. You will notice that this Newsletter is early - the May NL has become the April NL. It was finished early and it seemed a pity not to send it off. The August one may be early too, depending on how many and how soon contributions come in.

At the February meeting in Melbourne, members commented on the great contribution made to the GDSG via the Newsletters by a relatively small number of members - **Barbara Buchanan**, **Geoff Simmons** and **Cherree Densley** were three whose efforts were particularly appreciated. Thank you to these members and all those who make my life as editor easy by writing wonderful articles without having to be prodded or reminded.

NEXT MEETINGS

Please see details of these meetings in text (pages W & 19)

MELBOURNE: Sunday May 7 at Karwarra, Kalorama

SYDNEY: May 27 &/or 28 please contact Jo Hambrett

NE VIC: Sunday June 18 at Barbara Buchanan's

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CORRESPONDENCE extracts

"The plants written about (in Geoff's article "Leafy sticks : cordylines and such-like" - see page 16) are more suited to the warmer regions of Australia, so the note may not have much relevance to most members of the Study Group, unless I have completely overlooked a genus or two of plants of similar appearance that thn've in cooler regions.

I think the proposed depiction of Magic Pudding characters (in a bronze sculpture in the new Children's Garden of the RBG Melbourne) is highly commendable. I am sure that there is quite a lot of Australians that could be used in Australian garden design." Geoff Simmons Old

Cordyline stricta at least is widely used as far south as Melbourne and Kuranga Nursery have four

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cordyline species listed in their catalogue. Geoff's suggestions for the use of such plants are welcome and valuable - we need ideas for designing with particular types of plants having distinctive characteristics.

I agree with Geoff's comments about the use of Australian in garden design, providing this is done with artistry and flair. I hadn't heard about the *Magic Pudding* characters before I received Geoff's letter - I'll look forward to seeing the sculpture. The RBG Director Philip Moors says The bronze sculpture is being created by Louis Laumen, whose recent works include the 'Weary'¹ Dunbp statue in Benalla and the *Widow and Children* at the Shrine of Remembrance. It is planned to be a 'magnet' for children, in a similar way to the Peter Pan sculpture in Hyde Park, London". DS

"I always enjoy an item by Barbara Buchanan in the Newsletter or in 'Growing Australian' (I turn to it first in the APS Vic Newsletter). So many of her feelings and ideas I can identify with. She has, I can tell, a vastly different and bigger garden than ours; her articles always make me want to visit her place. In this issue I particularly liked, and I quote"... most APS members at least aim to have a natural look predominating; and I would argue that we like a certain amount of order, not necessarily showing in obvious lines but in the underlying harmony and balance of shapes and colours, masses and voids... for this control to be so subtle that it is not obvious unless it is carefully looked for. ... There is a real challenge to meet and still have a garden that belongs. Thank goodness I don't have a garden that is any drier". Hear, hear Barbara. If it doesn't cool down and rain soon...." **Pat Webb** Vic

I agree, but we must not forget members (and others) from arid areas of Australia Their gardens will be very different but equally beautiful in their own way. DS

News from Mt Clay

Cherree Densley Vic

"Mt Clay is a 'blooming wilderness' in late December - the grasses are in full bloom. Wallaby, Kangaroo and Weeping Grasses look good. Around the house there is unfortunately a lot of fog and sweet vernal too, which will need some tedious but necessary hand weeding. However, I have managed to get rid of all the capeweed at present, so there is success there. Spraying or mowing would be too drastic as there are lots of Leek Orchids, wahlenbergias, and violas still lowering - and stackhousia, hypoxis, Love Creeper, clematis, hibbertias, kennedias and Pterostylis nutans seeding, and plants like lomandras, dianellas and Grass Lilies growing strongly. I am thrilled that I have had a good regeneration of Yam Daisies • or they took very much like Yam Daisies. (Local opinion is divided as to the identity of these yam-like plants.) My aim for a weed-free grassland surrounding the garden beds may be just too hard as any bare weeded areas are going to be wonderful seed beds for more weeds. Mulching is inappropriate for this area as it would smother seeding of native species.

I planted a Tasmanian garden at Mt Clay in a cool, sloping and well drained area which is a natural drainage line from the volcanic cone to the east. It has rich volcanic loam over volcanic rock. I planted the

following: ~~*Atherosperma moschatum*~~ (Southern Sassafras), ~~*Athrotaxis taxiroia*~~ (Open-leaved Tasmanian Pine), ~~*Ammobium calyceroides*~~, ~~*Baeckea aunniana*~~, ~~*Blandfordia punicea*~~ (Tasmanian Christmas Bells), ~~*Bauera rubioides*~~ Thai Harbour, ~~*Cvatrodes alauca*~~ (Cheeseberry), ~~*C. parvifolia*~~ (Pink Mountain Berry), ~~*Correa reflexa*~~ (Petal Point forms), ~~*Dillwynia alaberrima*~~, ~~*Epacris petrophila*~~ (Lake Augusta), ~~*Epachis paludosa*~~ (not Tassie but from Flinders Is.), ~~*Eriostemon viratus*~~, ~~*Gumnera cordifolia*~~, ~~*Gymnoshoenus sphaerocephalus*~~ (Button Grass) (supreme name for a supreme plant - seeing this in the wild was the highlight of the trip for me. It was flowering along the east coast too.), ~~*Nothofagus cumminahamii*~~ (Myrtle Beech), ~~*Ozothamnus obcordatus*~~, ~~*Pimelea nivea*~~ (Snowy Pimelea), ~~*Poa rodwavi*~~, ~~*Podocarpus lawrencei*~~ (Mountain Plum Pine), ~~*Podolepis iaceoides*~~, ~~*Richea scoparia*~~, ~~*Tasmannia lanceolata*~~ (Mountain Pepper) (male plant, do I need a female?), ~~*Vetiveria*~~ sp. (the perfumed one - I didn't write down the species name). These plants and others I had the good fortune to purchase will remind me of a great holiday. ("Unfortunately, according to the Encyclopaedia, Button Grass is now ~~*Chaetospora sphaerocephala*~~ - not quite the same ring to it. DS)

Meantime here at Killarney, the garden is getting its annual big cleanup/prune back. It has been a superb growing spring and many plants have put on a huge amount of growth. However none of them grow as fast as the milk thistles!"

To mulch, or not to mulch?

Geoff Simmons Old

"Inspiration for the article (see page 14) came about as I am in the process of preparing and planting an area with Australian shrubs and trees which produce edible fruit or nuts. A bobcat had to be used to clear the regrowth after the bush fire in 1994. This exposed much clay mixed with rocks. Seeing the cleared area, I decided against mulching, instead relying on weed mat and herbicide or hand weeding to keep the ground bare. Grasses may defeat me in the long term, but nevertheless it is worthwhile acting about something I had long felt was over-emphasized and out of step with the actual situation in some of the Australian plant communities I had seen. I can also recall visiting a garden of Australian plants many years ago where sawdust and nitrogen had been copiously applied - the result was fantastic growth but few if any flowers.

The massed flower concept so much a part of the cottage garden theme is by no means the norm for Australia. Hence I feel that there is a limit for this to occur in Australian garden design. The onus is on the mulching proponents to pinpoint the vegetative systems in Australia that truly justify the advocacy of the application of a thick layer of organic mulch. As a minor point, for most gardens it is preferable from the aspect of salinity if trees or shrubs are encouraged to send roots deep down rather than in the top 100-200 mm."

We have found that wherever eucalypts grow in our garden, these provide what seems to be an appropriate amount of bark, leaf and twig litter as mulch for the surrounding area. In other areas organic mulch for around shrubs is supplied by shredded prunings, and groundcovers act as living mulch. The only material we buy is for an open area, where a load of woodchips lasts for several years. (There's also one area

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of the garden where we've used sand and gravel as mulch in the past - it proved a marvellous seed bed for weeds.) What are your experiences with mulch? DS

A matter of emotion

In a recent 'Good Weekend' magazine, Sydney garden writer Cheryl Maddocks advocated the use of Australian ("native") plants in gardens. Following this, I noticed a letter in 'Good Weekend' by GDSG member **Erica Nathan** vic (from near Ballarat). Erica wrote:

"Cheryl Maddocks appears sorry for the vast multitude of Australian plants (Gardening, January 15), suggesting that 'natives' should be planted to boost nationalist sympathies. Her article is entitled "Native intelligence", but what about native emotion?"

I love Australian plants. I am reading this article in my garden. At one side, my luscious, velvet-toned Kangaroo Paws sprout sharp claws; a Native Frangipani puffs out a cloud of hot, sweet perfume; while a massive grevillea jettisons an army of bees towards the page. It takes some moments for the seething greenery to resume its hazy decorum.

I soothe them all with murmurs of their subtle beauty. And I praise their intriguing, unaided resilience to the climatic turbulence of my Yendon home."

TREE ROOTS

Trees vs foundations

Just a few quotes from the paper presented by **Dennis Nielsen** at the ASGAP Conference last year, which started **Nicky Rose** Vic thinking about such matters. Dennis Nielsen owns a native nursery, is a keen native gardener and the proprietor of a building company specialising in underpinning residential dwellings, so he has wide experience.

A copy of the paper was sent to me by **Lyn & Peter Reilly** Qld.

- The moment a tree is planted it has the potential to alter the moisture content around the footing zone. A house constructed on reactive clay, with many trees planted in close proximity and lack of general watering and maintenance, has potential to experience subsidence.
 - As well as footing failures other problems associated with trees are blocked drains and pressure of tree roots on retaining walls and fences.
 - It is possible to isolate trees from dwellings using proprietary brand root barriers or concrete walls. While these are expensive the cost is only minimal compared to that of major structural repairs.
 - According to the classification of the type of site, a guide for the distance single trees should be planted from a dwelling suggests 0.75, 1.0 or 1.5 times the height of the tree. If in a group it is recommended that the distance be increased to 1.5 times this.
-

Drain-cloggers

Joan Barrett Vic

In answer to **Nicky Rose's** question in the last NIL, Joan Barrett reminded me that 'Grow What Where' (Nelson) lists drain-cloggers (on page 209). Two lists of plants are given - one "Not within 2m of drains or sewerage pipes" and the other "Not within 3.5m ...". A number of acacias, eucalypts and melaleucas are included in both lists. There are also some casuarinas (in the 3.5m list) and callistemons & hakeas (2m). 1, 2 or 3 species of 16 other genera are named.

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Tree roots

Mark James Vic

In the same way that tree branches grow into available spaces to face their leaves to the sun, so their roots grow along moisture gradients in their search for water, nutrients and oxygen. The disturbed soil around pipes and buildings provides less resistance for root tips as they are forced through the soil.

In the case of drainage pipes, root tips can find easy passage through the large pores present in the gravel and disturbed soil. If the drainage system has been damaged due to subsidence or even heavy-handed backfilling, then nearby root tips can enter the opening. As the roots grow and expand radially, further damage is done to the pipe.

(Once, when helping a neighbour with a blocked drain, we discovered that a spectacular orange mycorrhizal fungus growing in symbiosis with the roots of the offending alder tree took up considerably more volume in the drainage system than the tree roots themselves.)

In the case of buildings and retaining walls, roots are unlikely to undermine foundations unless there is moist soil on the other side of the structure. Damage usually occurs when roots remove the moisture from the adjacent soil, causing it to contract away from the foundations. This situation is more likely to occur in soils with small particle sizes such as highly expansive clays.

Most tree roots can be effectively deterred by thoroughly compacting disturbed soil after building or drainage works.

I have no specific information on Australian plants other than obvious examples such as *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*. Drought resistant species may have lower water requirements, but these species typically have vigorous root systems capable of exploiting any available soil moisture. Perhaps the best solution is to select plants that do not require more water than will be provided by rainfall and any supplementary irrigation.

Trees which may damage structures

Margaret Lee S.A.

Sorry I haven't been able to do much for the GDSG lately. I seem to be slowing up, or commitments are increasing and now I'm frantically trying to prepare for a trip to Papua New Guinea, where I'll probably take hundreds of photos of plants I can never hope to grow. Although it was interesting, when on the ASGAP trip to the Atherton Tablelands, to see just how many plants from that area we are growing successfully here, often with very little supplementary water.

In response to your request for information about trees which may damage structures, I enclose a summary of a seminar held by the Civic Trust some years ago. There is a brochure put out by the E & WS Department with categories of trees and shrubs most likely, likely and unlikely to cause damage, based on information from the Adelaide metropolitan area, and relating to those which are readily available here. However I believe it would be of limited use Australia-wide as soil, rainfall and construction methods all differ. The comment that any tree or shrub may infiltrate a leaking pipe is probably true and damage to buildings is

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very dependent upon soil type and rainfall, what was on the site originally, whether the structure was built before or after planting trees, depth of water table, watering regime, and so on. The advice to treat all areas around a house in the same way, that is all dry or all watered, is probably sensible if on reactive clay. We may have a dry paved area on one side of the building and a heavily watered lawn or rainforest on another, which can cause problems.

If anyone wants more information the Institution of Engineers could probably help, and quite a lot of work has been done in this State by various bodies such as the Civic Trust.

Trees vs sewers - a problem of co-existence

A few extracts I found interesting in the report of the Public Seminar held by the Civic Trust of S.A. (sent by **Margaret Lee S.A.**)

* Recent decades have seen telephone and electricity conduits placed largely underground with considerable savings in the costs of maintaining services which hitherto were incurred in tree lopping to avoid interference but at the same time impairing the effectiveness of the plants in the landscape.

(Why can't other cities be as civilised as Adelaide? DS)

• Roots will penetrate pipes only if there is a leak which may be very small but which establishes a moisture gradient in the soil surrounding the fissure through which fine roots penetrate and once inside proliferate, sometimes enormously. There are no species which when growing nearby will fail to penetrate a drain in such circumstances but, in general, the more vigorous the species the more this is likely. At the same time the more vigorous species are often the most important component in the landscape.

• Once we realize that it is the differential between our short wet winter and long dry summer causing the expansion and contraction of reactive (clay) soils which in turn causes the shifting of pipes, then we would be less prepared to blame the trees and more disposed to retain water on the property, therefore reducing the differential movement and cracking of pipes leading to tree root intrusion. The retained water would also grow plants and reduce water bills.

• The Valuer-General considered trees contribute 5% of the total property value and an American figure had put the contribution as between 7% and 15%.

DESIGN

Design criteria for judging gardens for competitions

Diana Snape for GDSG Melbourne

The following were criteria for garden design we came up with in a 'brain-storming' session at the February meeting. They are not in a particular order, though some are probably more important than others. People actually involved in judging gardens for a competition could assign a certain number of points for each category according to their perceived importance - there are 16 altogether, so each could be allocated 3 or 5 points to make a total of (say) 50 or 60.

I think it enables Australian gardens of very different types to be compared. For example some garden owners may choose to create a high maintenance garden while others prefer one which requires low

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maintenance. That is their choice and should not, I think, be judged. What matters is the results they achieve in the end, eg the presence of weeds in a garden will tend to detract from the 'harmony and unity' of the garden, so points would be lost in this category. Similar considerations apply to the differences between a formal and a more naturalistic garden. The amount of pruning can influence categories such as 'overall structure and balance', and possibly 'effective screening' and 'paths to lead around the garden'.

This list could also be helpful to each of us when we look at our own gardens and wonder how we could improve them.

Please let me know your thoughts on this topic. Are there any categories you would like to add, or delete? Would you like to try putting them, individually or grouped, in order of importance?

-
- pleasing spaces - to look at and be in
- harmony and unity
- contrasts and textures
- overall structure and balance
- paths to lead around the garden
- vistas - from the house and within the garden
- framework of trees - balance of sunshine and shade
- use of water, both ornamental and conservation
- delights and surprises
- relation of garden to house
- effective screening - of both external and internal areas
- blending of hard landscape into soft - includes sympathetic use of rocks
- inclusion of local (indigenous) plants
- dominance of Australian plants (essential in an Australian garden)
- provision for wildlife
- appeal to the senses - light and colour, fragrance, sounds, touch.

Another approach

Joy Roberts Vic

Joy Roberts suggests that the following elements and design principles, taken from Paul Urquhart's book *The New Native Garden*, page 18, could be the basis of a scheme for judging gardens:

- the elements of form, structure and function;
- the design principles of surprise; space; movement; balance; levels and lines;
- the resulting shapes and patterns.

These concepts are all expanded in the text.

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Further suggestions

Charles HrubosVic

I very much appreciated receiving the judging guidelines from you. Forwarded a copy to Jim Drysdale, and his comment was that some of the criteria, especially harmony and balance, may be hard to define.

(There are certainly subjective aspects to this (or any?) scheme. DS)

I also place importance on the environmentally friendly nature of a garden, eg when in relation to a house the trees and shrubs should be planted in such a way that they shade windows on the western side of a house from hot afternoon sun; also on the northern aspect, the winter sun should be allowed ready access to windows for winter warming. In the middle of summer, a garden should also provide cool places to sit and relax.

(I think this would come into 'relation of garden to house' and framework of trees - balance of sunshine and shade'. DS)

I think a garden should also cater for interactivity with people and children. I would be looking for appropriate recreation areas, possibly passive like outdoor seating areas for adults, or play areas for children; also maybe BBQ areas.

These are two further areas that you might consider.

Another suggestion by **Norm and Maureen Webb** NSW (see page 11) is that a well designed garden should have **countour**... eg mounding, different levels, interesting steps, etc.

(I think this probably comes into 'overall structure and balance'. It might be difficult to compare fairly, for 'contour', two gardens, one on a completely flat block and another with interesting natural contours. DS)

GARDENS

Cherree's secret garden

Pat Webb vic

My initial reaction - only Cherree would have the energy to take on yet another big challenge! Good luck - what a size - twice the area of our garden years ago in Box Hill. Lovely to have Tower Hill in your borrowed landscape. Perhaps I had forgotten your willing, efficient and industrious mate and helper! I love the plant selection (though not knowing some of them) but what fun to have an area to grow low-growing plants without shade. I guess the damper area will be around the seepage/drainage line.

Three aspects which puzzle me are:

- 'Ankle-high' plants - or surely some will be mid-calf? (But maybe you're wearing stiletto heels in the garden these days, Cherree.)
- The pathway half a metre below the surface of the soil - will the pathways become waterways after heavy rain?
- The sheep - will Ian put up a notice "Sheep not allowed in here", or an ankle-high fence?

Sheep BAAAAAAnned

Some further plant suggestions:

- *Leptospermum rotundifolium* 'Julie Ann' prostrate form (Round-leaf Tea-tree)
- *Lasiopetalum macrophyllum* prostrate form (Shrubby Velvet-bush)

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- *Thomasia pygmaea* (Dwarf Paper-flower)
- *Kennedia rubicunda* (Dusky Coral-pea) (may take over!)
- *Pratia pedunculata*
- *Leptorhynchos tenuifolius* (Wiry Buttons)
- *Astroloma humifusum* (Cranberry Heath) and other *Astroloma* species

For the damp areas:

- *Mazuspumilb* (Swamp Mazus)
- *Goodenia humilis* (Swamp Goodenia) and *G. lanata* (Trailing Goodenia)
- *Scutellaria humilis* (Dwarf Skull Cap!)

Cherree's secret garden

Monika Herrmann Vic

I like your lowest drawing (NL28-9) for maximum viewing close to path, ie narrower beds. Large mats of whatever you propagate will look lovely - it's very much your personal taste. Some plants which may be useful for your 'living carpet':

- *Spyridium* 'prostrate' - dense clumping, greyish look
- *Correa* 'Squat Bells' also *C. decumbens* - low, prostrate form
- *Correa reflexa* var *nummularifolia*
- *Goodenia humilis* - tough floriferous rosettes & *G. lanata* - a light trailer, moist
- *Grewia cun/itoba* - tough, light green foliage and white flowers
- *Chrysocephalum ramosissimum* - I think a great 'carpet' plant, long flowering, compact and low
- *Bracteantha bracteatum* 'Diamond Head' compact - may need more moisture
- *Hibbertia pedunculata* - the toughest, but others?
- *Dampiera diversifolia* - I have found this a wonderful mat - your soil?
- *Scaevola* 'Mauve Ousters' - combine with local white form? survives dry

You have listed the prostrate banksias which have an upright form - would *Wahlenbergia glohosa* grow there? That marvellous blue amongst the golds? The winds may be too harsh.

Diana Snape Vic

I like Cherree's middle plan (NL28-9) best, though maybe with the path a little more distant from the four edges. As all the plants will be low, the whole garden and the paths should be visible from any point. I don't think the area should be broken up too much, so the tapestry (or carpet) effect is not too much intersected by the lines of the pathway. This should give a wonderful feeling of space and enable complex patterns of plants to be developed. I also prefer a more direct route through the garden, with a couple of alternative choices, rather than having to walk a long way round with the possible temptation to take short cuts. If it's found to be necessary (for weeding and general garden maintenance), a few additional, impermanent 'wallaby paths' might develop for access.

The actual plants to be used could be largely determined by availability, but I think much repetition of a number of species is essential, to avoid a 'speckled' effect. Natural alpine and coastal heath areas are wonderful models. Plants with dense foliage and/or compact forms will look better than those which are sparse or straggly, though somewhat sparse prostrate banksias can look marvellous because of the strength of their form and foliage. Very prostrate plants and those with small leaves could be concentrated next to the pathway. As well as foliage size, the other factor of course is foliage colour, far more important than flower colour for most of the year. I'm sure that designing with a range of greens (plus highlights of silver) will be great fun for Cherree!

Garden visits in Melbourne

Norm and Maureen Webb NSW

Family need required us to visit Melbourne in February and fortunately we noted from our GDSG Newsletter that a meeting was to be held whilst we were to be there. A phone call to Diana told us we would be welcome to attend. The meeting was at **Tony and Joy Roberts'** property at Nutfield, some distance north-east of Melbourne, and we arrived just in time for a garden viewing.

Tony and Joy's well-designed house, not long finished, was perched above the surrounding rural countryside. Looking directly from the house, an attractive dam and small forested area were visible. The native garden was in close proximity to and surrounding the house. Maureen and I both felt the garden was pleasing to look at and well designed. There were many beautiful boulders strategically placed through the garden and these were complemented by Grass-trees also placed in thoughtful ways. Many small and medium shrubs seemed to be thriving in this open sunny situation and small plants were flowering, adding to the very pleasing picture of a natural landscape. GDSG member **Bev Hanson** (who also attended the meeting) had a large part to play in the design of the garden and deserves due credit.

Following the garden viewing, many topics were discussed at the meeting. One I found to be of particular interest was "What constitutes a well designed Australian plant garden?". With input from the group some sound guidelines were worked out and I suspect may be outlined by Diana in this Newsletter (see page 7). Since then I have thought of one more which should be considered if not already on the list - a well designed garden should have contour... eg mounding, different levels, interesting steps, etc. What do other members think? We thank the GDSG for including us in their meeting and garden viewing and hope to meet up when we are down that way again.

While in Melbourne we visited as many green patches as possible shown on the Melway's Street Directory. Some were Fitzroy Gardens, Royal Botanic Gardens (excellent), Blackburn Lake Sanctuary and nearby Blackburn Creek Reserve, Maranoa Gardens and Warrandyte State Reserve. We like Victoria and believe there is an enthusiasm for bush regeneration evident in many areas.

BOOKS, MAGAZINES & THE INTERNET

designing THE book

Erica Nathan Vic

There is no doubt it must be 'my turn' to contribute to the Newsletter. I've enjoyed so many past offerings. The conversation about what constitutes an Australian garden is one I've followed with interest but not always with enough attention, so I hope I'm not repeating too many old thoughts. Here goes...

I like the idea of this Newsletter, and a possible book, really *celebrating* (waxing-lyrical-stuff) the amazing positives of our flora and attempting some definition of an Australian plant garden. This does not mean, as has been pointed out, slavishly superimposing traditional garden styles on the Australian range of plants. The extraordinary diversity of our plants, including the exciting potential for cultivar selection, defies such mean parameters. Perhaps the dizzy heights and breadths of our flora overrides **any** attempt at stylistic classification, including a revised Australian-sensitive version? For me, it's the superb subtlety of foliage, of plant form and of flower effect, which distinguishes our flora, empowering our evergreen garden landscape to metamorphose along a spectrum from harsh sunlight to overcast greys. I think we do need a new language to describe Australian plant gardens. And here I jump a bit. /fit is agreed that:

- Australian plants in themselves give definitive distinction to Australian gardens
- traditional garden styles are rejected
- a new classification system is inadequate/controversial

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then, *is it possible to create words which somehow emanate more from our flora than from garden style categories?* Our plants seem to transcend the formal, the grassland, or the cottage. *What gives structure to our 'thinking' about Australian plant design?* Does the existing emphasis on garden styles and materials design in mainstream horticultural/landscape arenas reflect a relative paucity in plant choice? An emphasis on Australian plant *diversity* resolves any bias to the southern temperate zone. And in that diversity we do find a fine-tuned structure. From an international perspective, our plants are in an ancient and dynamic relationship with soil, climate and landscape...

and here I betray my proximity to Ballarat, where plants exhibit an extraordinary range of weather-defying resilience, over the span of just three days, one which does not rely on sprinkler systems. Nor on highly cultivated, modified soils. Our flora still retains a visible connection to our myriad of soil types. Rather than alienate half the population with environmental "shoulds", let's allow the immense range of Australian plants to weave its subtle web over minds often dominated by culturally-derived notions of beauty (my daughter's idealised garden shares a vision held by Barbara Buchanan's primary school colleagues of old), which in turn rely on truckloads of un-ecological garden appliances and hardware.

I am wary of nationalist-moralists (including the sub-genera of guilt-driven plant generalists) who assert we should plant Australian because we:

- live in Australia
- should proudly trumpet out indigenous and unique flora
- require a cultural identity which exemplifies our maturity from Anglo-European tradition
- as conservationists should be water-wise and resources-mindful.

In garden terms this is *boring* rationale. This is not to deny that in another forum such perspectives may be of great interest. A tapestry of text, graphics, paintings and photographs can demonstrate the power of the Australian garden landscape to generate a multitude of magical moments. I 'vote' for a GDSG book which is emotional, not sensible; exciting, not predictable; stimulating, not didactic; bold, not defensive and ... different, just like Australian plant gardens???

Mmmn, I hope I have the courage to write again!

/ hope Erica does write again! I agree with her 'vote', with just one exception - I think the book has to be sensible as well as emotional. I suspect I'm one of the 'nationalist-moralists' Erica is wary of, in addition to being an Australian plant enthusiast/fanatic. There are so many Australians who are neither, we may need every possible approach to make contact with the majority. It's difficult to create a 'new' language but we can certainly try to use the 'old' one with greater sensitivity and accuracy. DS

Book ideas

Margaret Lee S.A.

I'm glad I read the February Newsletter as soon as it arrived, as I had started a review of Paul Urquhart's book and I need go no further. I agree with your comments. Although the principles of design remain unchanged, examples and species really need to be more specific to areas. Perhaps we need a basic book with accompanying booklets for different areas of Australia. It is just too large to try to cover generally. One gets very frustrated when clients produce books and magazines of eastern state origin and say they "would like a garden like this" or wish to grow plants which will not tolerate our desiccating summers and alkaline clays.

Why spend so much time, money and resources to create microclimates when we really need to adjust to reality? We need more attractively illustrated books showing what can be achieved in areas away from the eastern seaboard. The catch is, it is not economically viable, as the buyers are mainly from the east.

Second reviews of books already reviewed are welcome, especially if they contain different perceptions. In our book I think we need to have a wide range of examples of attractive gardens from different areas, particularly more arid areas - we do need photos of these!! DS

The February-March issue of '**Australian Horticulture**' contained seven (1) articles of special interest.

- One was a 3-page profile of **Rodger Elliot**. We all know of Rodger's work on the '*Encyclopaedia of Australian Plants*' (7 volumes so far) and a number of other books, and possibly a few of his other roles. However when we read a more complete summary of his achievements, it's difficult to believe so much has been accomplished by just one person (with the support of Gwen, of course). Congratulations, Roger!

Gardens

- **Australian face for floral clock** - the floral clock in King's Park and BG, W.A., has undergone major renovation using nothing but Australian plants, more than 90% of which are Western Australian. New plantings of the floral clock face occur seasonally, five times a year - two changes in spring. To date, the displays have been Stud's Desert Pea (once *Clianthus formosus* - see below) for winter; yellow everlastings (*Schoenia* sp.) followed by Swan River Daisies (*Brachyscome iberidifolia*) for spring; and lechenaultias in early summer; with late summer of the northern annuals *Ptilotus* sp. (Mulla-mulla) and *Gomphrena* sp.

The Roman numerals are a permanent feature of the clock. Made of a deep-green hybrid leptospermum surrounded by silver *Leucophyta brownii* (Cushion Bush) they are living proof that certain Australian plants are adaptable to the most disciplined formats. Maintenance includes daily weeding and dead-heading and fortnightly trimming of the numerals with small battery-operated hedging shears.

I'd love to have a photo of this floral clock for the book! Any members in or visiting Perth please come to our help. DS

- A relatively new addition to the Flecker Botanic Gardens in Cairns displays **Australia's Gondwana Heritage**. This should help the general public understand Gondwana plants. It aims to represent species of special conservation value in a comprehensive, interpretive way and to display the evolution of wet tropic flora. (The Flecker BG is situated 4km north of the city centre and is open seven days a week.)

- An article by Helen Moody on **Revival of the Australian native garden** is based on big growth in sales in nurseries, and Paul Urquhart's new book which is reviewed with enthusiasm.

Plants for design

- **Gwen Elliot** writes a regular article on Australian plants, always worth reading. This issue it's on grafted eremophilas and Sturt's Desert Pea (now *Willdampia formosa* - is nothing sacred?)

- **Cultivars**. Students of Burnley College, working with the RBG Melbourne and a number of mentors, have researched and described cultivars. Each folio is then permanently housed with a reference specimen at the National Herbarium of Victoria. Cultivars of Australian plants described include a number belonging to the following genera: banksia; boronia; brachyscome; bracteantha; callistemon; crowea; grevillea; telopea.

- **Cloning success with *Angophora costata***. The elite-tree program at the Institute for Horticultural Development (Knoxfield, Vic) has shown, through successful vegetative propagation of *Angophora costata*, that ornamental Australian tree production can be based on elite cultivars. DS

14 DESIGN IDEAS

Organic mulch as a facet of the Australian scene

Geoff Simmons Qld

Invariably writers in garden magazines and TV presenters stress the importance of distributing a thick layer of organic mulch, such as straw or bark, on garden beds. This is alleged to:

- suppress weeds
- supply nutrients on decomposition
- be aesthetically pleasing
- reduce water requirements
- produce a more favourable microclimate for soil organisms such as worms, fungi and bacteria.

The other side of the coin can be summarized as:

- additional cost of mulching material
- harbourers of harmful organisms such as fungi
- possibility of matting, preventing water penetration
- introducers of weeds
- nitrogen depletion if a material such as sawdust is used
- constitute a fire hazard as I have experienced when bush fires occur.

Having listed the good and bad features of organic mulching practices, it is worthwhile examining what fits the Australian scene in nature and consequently should be a factor in the design of an Australian garden. Before considering examples and so risking the ire of permaculture advocates it is necessary to stress that the subject is gardening with Australian plants in an Australian context - not the beneficial production of fruit and vegetables.

Four situations are cited as examples where leaf litter is not a major characteristic of the Australian environment.

1. Desert areas with limited plant life. This is not a garden scene that members will want to emulate unless living in these conditions.
2. Sand plains such as seen in some wonderful wild-flower areas of W.A. On a tour north of Perth, one impression gained was the very open spaces with minimal amount of litter. In these very floriferous areas a thick mulch was not present. Is this a lesson for designers of Australian gardens? Both from appearance and ecology this display has something to offer in the way of garden design.
3. Forest areas - it is often stated that some Australian forests exist on very poor soils and that tall trees only exist because the decomposing litter supplies nutrients. However some of the forests that I have seen have a very thin layer of leaves, etc. and virtually no under-storey of small and medium size plants. The scattered tall trees effectively form a canopy and presumably have a voracious appetite for the limited amount of rotting litter. Hence there could be a case for buying and using only small quantities of organic mulch in gardens where trees are a feature.
4. In dryer southern regions of Australia, gum trees (especially mallees) are a common sight. In these

areas the trees are separated by sand that often shifts with the wind. Litter is scarce with the few leaves often blown to the base of a tree. This type of landscape should be taken into account when the plants used come from such locations.

Many Australian plants have developed mechanisms for utilizing elements such as nitrogen and phosphorus that are in small amounts or unavailable in impoverished soils, so it could be unnecessary and poor practice from both nutritional and aesthetic aspects to follow the heavy mulching philosophy that seems to belie the true nature of the Australian continent.

Once again Geoff shows original thought in re-examining a widely accepted practice. I think his approach has great merit - what do you think? DS

Extending the view

Cherree Densley Vic

How many of us try to excite the eye of the observer? Here are some ideas which have appealed to me when looking at others' gardens.

- Three beautiful trunks of strategically placed ironbarks at the bend of a wide pathway.
- Views through straight tree trunks, trimmed of side branches to allow wonderful views of a distant vista.
- Against a fairly uninteresting wall or fence, groups of containers of different sizes and heights filled with a mixture of plants, to draw the eye.
- Open spaces left deliberately to have 'breathing' areas or just resting areas with leaf litter and grasses (most of us keen gardeners do tend to 'cram in' far too much).
- Plenty of contrived heavy planting on the convex curves (inside of bends) to hide what is around the corner.
- Junctions along pathways to give one a choice - do I go this way or that?
- Undulating surface of a pathway where it dipped and rose as one walked along. (This can be a bit dangerous if you are not watching your feet as you walk.)
- An inviting view of a rustic seat away at the furthest viewpoint, preferably beneath a shady tree.
- Grey plants along a pathway to help when walking in the moonlight. (I have been reading about very early Turkish gardens which were planned for viewing at night - what an exciting concept that is. I always try to visit my bush block when the moon is at its fullest - the bush is magic in full moon.)
- A water feature is much more interesting if it's integrated within the walking area - put a bridge or stepping stones over it, or bring the pathway directly along one edge of the water.

An additional note:-

- Bold plants such as palms and doryanthus on their own can be far too dominant and actually make a garden area where they are planted look smaller. (It's like one huge piece of furniture in a room.)

Water features in gardens by Ian Waldron

1999 ASGAP Conference paper supplied by **Lyn & Peter Reilly Old**

(Apparently a paper was not provided of the talk on landscape design mentioned in an earlier NL)

8 reasons were given for having a water feature in a garden:

- to convert a naturally wet and boggy area, a nuisance, into an attractive focal point

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- to provide a habitat for the local wildlife, frogs, ducks, etc.
- to provide for plants which require a constant and copious supply of water
- to redirect over-ground storm water runoff away from the house, eg as a normally dry creek bed (to appear natural, a creek must fit the natural drainage)
- as a source of humidity within a rainforest garden
- a difficult area, eg a rock shelf just below groundlevel, can be a good solid foundation for a small waterfall and pond system
- when water mirrors the sky and surrounding plants another dimension is added to the garden space
- to provide the soothing and relaxing sound of running water in the garden.

The talk covered placement of water features ("limited only by your imagination"), safety aspects, design and construction, and planting (depth and temperature of water, zones). Making allowance for both overflow and drainage of a pond is advocated, and always checking levels to allow for the flow of water. Once construction begins, reasons are given for starting from the lowest point of the water feature and working upwards towards the highest point.

Finally I liked the enthusiasm of the following quote:- "Despite the improving efforts of mankind, nature itself reigns supreme with regard to the great Australian waterily, *Nymphaea gigantea*. With its varied and diversified forms it supersedes all other nymphaeas with respect to size and overall beauty. Such magnificently splendid flowers and plants are yet to be equalled among other native or hybrid forms." (Kenneth C. Landon, Department of Botany, University of Texas, 1978.)

References quoted in the paper:

Water in your Garden by Paul Thompson 1991 (Lothian)

Water and Wetland Plants for Southern Australia by Nick Romanowski 1992 (Lothian)

PLANTS in DESIGN

Leafy sticks - cordylines and such-like

Geoff Simmons Old

A chance remark by an acquaintance that plants such as cordylines and dracaenas had no appeal is the basis for writing this note. The multitude of many-coloured exotic cordylines ensures their place in gardens of the warmer regions of Australia. However Australian cordylines are usually green and can be described as straight sticks with leaves. Although one is named *C. rubra* the rubra refers to the seeds and not the leaves (Red-fruited Palm-lily). In fact these sprays of seeds, black or red, of the Australian cordylines can be considered a desirable feature when a garden of Australian plants is being planned. They also vary in height - *C. manners-suttoniae* can be several metres tall. *C. stricta* (Slender Palm-lily) is also a tall plant but may branch low down.

C. manners-suttoniae was used in multiple groups in a small bed of several square metres. Three groups of plants grown from seeds were planted about half a metre apart with about one metre between the groups. When about 30 cm high, the tops were cut off to produce multiple stems from lower nodes. This single species use seems to be a promising way to use this type of plant. The absence of other bushy shrubs or annuals enables the upright nature to be clearly seen, adding to the architectural aspect. This bed also contains at one side a single specimen of *Alpinia caerulea* (Native Ginger) and this also fits the leafy stick category to some extent.

Another use of cordylines is a short row of *C. stricta* in a narrow, oblong space and here again monoculture seems to give an effective outcome.

Perhaps these plants and those of a similar habit could be close planted in clumps along each side of a path to denote an entrance or guide posts to beyond.

Plants in design (from NE Vic meeting)

Barbara Buchanan Vic

- *Banksia robur* (Swamp Banksia) is valuable in a prominent position, with bronze foliage in November and new flowers developing in February, bringing in the honeyeaters. We need to think about plants to recommend as features.

- The ground cover *Persoonia chamaepitys* is appreciated for its lovely green colour.

- An attractive picture is created by the exotic silver-grey foliated Wormwood (on the edge of the vegie garden) against *Eriostemon myoporoides* with *Eucalyptus pulverulenta* (Silver-leaved Mountain Gum) behind. **Gloria Thomlinson**

- An indigenous grey-foliaged saltbush reappeared naturally under *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*; making quite a picture; also lovely trunks of *Leptospermum liversidgei* seen in Queensland. **Paul Kennedy**

SNIPPETS

Hibiscus geranioides details

Colleen Keena Qld

Some members wanted to know details about *Hibiscus geranioides* so Colleen provided this information. The hibiscus with attractive pink flowers is NOT *H. geranioides* but *H. pedunculatus* from South Africa. As I understand it, the plants available here and also the ones I saw while in Melbourne are the South African species, that is, *H. pedunculatus* and not *H. geranioides*.

Hibiscus geranioides was described by George Bentham in 1862 in the '*Flora Australiensis*'. The true *H. geranioides* is a small bush to about 50 cm high with a somewhat weedy appearance and not particularly attractive flowers. It is not uncommon on the islands of the Northern Territory and Western Australia."

'Terrific Temptations' advertised two notable Australian plants at the March RBG Melbourne Plant Sale:

- "Out with the silver birches! In with a copse of the silvery trunked *Eucalyptus caesia* hung with gold tipped deep pink stamens protruding from little silver caps....

- A very large tussock of 2 - 3 metre long leaves and a tall sturdy erect stem topped by a spike of red flowers describes *Doryanthes palmeri*, the Australian Spear Lily. A stunning architectural feature for your garden."

I think I detect the pen of GDSG member **Linda Floyd** Vic.

MEETINGS

Melbourne meetings

Report of meeting held at **Tony & Joy Roberts'** on Sunday February 6

It was a pleasure to welcome NSW visitors **Norman** and **Maureen Webb** to this meeting.

We were impressed by the progress that Joy & Tony's garden has made since our last visit. Many groundcover plants and low shrubs are now well established, blooming with health even after the recent very hot weather. The large rocks, skilfully placed by **Bev Hanson**, look as though they've always been there. Tony and Joy have used a lot of repetition to achieve harmony in their garden, with many daisies, scaevolae, hibbertias, low banksias, correas, Kangaroo Paws and numerous other genera. A group of Grass-

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trees in a gravel area have settled in beautifully. A number of well placed eucalypts of several different species are now about a metre high and in a year or so will be tall enough to begin to link the house and garden into the surrounding landscape.

The members present voted to continue supporting both RBG Cranbourne in Victoria and the Grevillea Garden near Bulli in NSW, which we have done for several years. It was decided we should also support Karwarra Garden in Kalorama, Victoria and Eurobodalla BG in Batemans Bay, NSW. These two gardens are curated by GDSG members **Marilyn Gray** and **John Knight** respectively (who did not ask for this support). All four of these gardens fulfill one of the main aims of the GDSG, which is to encourage the opening of well designed gardens showcasing Australian plants to the general public. Groups of members in other states are welcome to suggest names of other public gardens which they think satisfy these criteria and should be supported by the GDSG.

We looked at criteria to assist people who have to judge gardens for competitions. This was a fascinating exercise. See the results on page 7.

We considered the design of the Friends of Gardiner's Creek area, 100 metres long and 30 m down the steep slope to the NE. Very few people had seen the site so it was difficult to picture the area even with the aid of the plan. However members produced some excellent ideas.

Report of meeting held at Diana Snape's on Sunday March 5

A quick garden visit, looking at different examples of pruning and then an area in which gravel mulch is almost hidden by fallen eucalypt leaves. The group decided we should let nature take its course rather than give ourselves constant work removing leaves to expose the gravel.

The focus of the meeting was looking at a design for a small area (4m x 4m) of **Linda Parlane's** garden, partly paved and the paved section covered with a pergola and vine. Ideas included a slightly concave curved wall, possibly coloured, with some mosaic work by Linda; on either side of this, creepers or shrubs as espaliers against the northern fence; a small, probably formal pool, again with some mosaic work; a *Eucalyptus caesia* (Linda has one growing well nearby); several pots for the paved area; and a carpet of groundcover plants in the open area. There was also the suggestion of using a mirror to expand the space visually. We'll look forward to seeing Linda's final plan for this area.

Next meeting: May 7 1.45 for 2 pm - visit to Karwarra. Mt Dandenong Tourist Road, Kalorama (Melway 120 B9) (entrance fee \$3). As well as the attractive garden, we'll see the newly opened entrance building. Please phone Diana Snape to indicate whether you can come.

Further meetings planned for this year - mark the dates in your calendar now:

July 2 - at Linda Floyd's: topic is decorating the garden, so bring any photos (or even small decorations) that you can (includes sculptures, ornaments, furniture, pots, fountains, lighting, sundials, windchimes, etc).

September 3 - at Chris Larkin's: mainly a visit to an exciting garden (featured in Paul Urquhart's book).

October 1 - possibly a full day workshop & **December 3** - end of year meeting - venue to be decided

NE Vic Branch

Report of last meeting held on Sunday February 27.

Barbara Buchanan Vic

A strong attendance ensured a very busy, stimulating meeting with much lively discussion.

Ideas for **Fiona McCallum's** garden included suggestions for plants for the dam surrounds (more suggestions still welcome) and the advantage of trunks as frames for the view.

Jacci Campbell reported the earthshaping at the back of her property is due shortly and will give her a

firmer base to work on. Although suffering from planter's withdrawal, she still strongly advocates living with a new house for some time before finalizing plans. Luckily the need for windbreaks will relieve her condition.

Discussion of large country gardens - comments included:

- two classes, with or without water - same principles apply; scale needs to be appropriate
- need for shade - lack of variety of Australian deciduous trees; skimpiness of eucalypts' shade, but there are other trees - *Callitris* sp., *Syzygium* sp., etc.
- need of lawns for oasis; for seed for finches; as area free of snakes; need for tranquillity
- challenge of creating oasis with Australian plants
- keeping views; fitting in with the environment
- wider range of situations compared with suburbia
- erratic, passionate climate, all one way or the other, drought or flood
- no need to screen the neighbours; more space for variety; more chance to see the seasons.

Some 'plants in design' noted - see page 17.

Garden walk:

- There is no lawn here, although old pasture is ground cover in open spaces away from the house. Gravel near house is appreciated.
- There is extensive shade now, especially in groves of eucalypts - harder to achieve in the suburbs.
- The general level of greenness was noted. We had 2 inches of rain recently but nothing else significant since Christmas. Only areas near the house are watered and not heavily.

Next meeting: Sunday June 18, 10.30 for 11 am, at Barbara Buchanan's

Please phone Barbara to indicate whether you can come.

Further meetings: September 5 at Buchanans' and **November 12 or 19** at Datsons'

Sydney branch

The site tour of Homebush Bay did not go ahead as there was insufficient support.

Next meeting on May 27 &/or 28 - GDSG tour hosted by Maureen and Norm Webb in their area (St Georges Basin near Nowra and Jervis Bay National Park). The itinerary includes:

- visits to award-winning Australian native gardens;
- exploring Jervis Bay Botanical Gardens;
- visiting remnant bushland areas currently being revitalized by the local bushcare group;
- beachwalk and dolphin-watching within Jervis Bay National Park-

Norm and Jo have information about accommodation for those who decide to spend two days.

It sounds a wonderful opportunity to combine some delightful activities. I hope all Sydney/NSW members who can, will take advantage of it.

Please Phone Jo Hambrett ASAP for details of arrangements and to let her know if you can go and on which days).

MEMBERSHIP

Peter Garnham Vic

187 membership subscriptions paid for the 1999/2000 financial year - approximately 224 members.

New members

A warm welcome to the following new members of the Study Group. We hope you enjoy your membership.

Sue Gwilym

Leeanne Neal

Lesley Waite

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Membership renewals

My apologies to any members who had sent in their subscription earlier but whose names werent included in the last NL Please let me know if, after you've paid, your name doesnt appear in the next NL

Margie & Geoff Barnett; John & Christine Beasley; APS S.A.

~~Reminder: 2000/2001 subscriptions become due on 1/7/00.~~

Please see enclosed separate subscription notice. Prompt payment will ensure your continuing receipt of the Newsletter. We trust that you find your membership of the Study Group worthwhile, and look forward to your on-going valuable involvement.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Peter Garnham Vic

FINANCIAL STATEMENT - Quarter ending 31/3/00

<u>Receipts</u>		<u>Expenses</u>	
Subscriptions	80.00	Postage	111.00
		Photocopying	242.05
		Duty (FID)	0.13
	<u>\$80.00</u>		<u>\$353.18</u>
Balance in bank (23/2/00)	3268.35		
Cheques in hand (31/3/00)	<u>30.00</u>		
Total funds - as at 31/3/00	<u>\$3298.35</u>		

In the next NL I'd like to focus on decorating the Australian garden - furniture, sculptures, ornaments, mosaics, pots, fountains, sundials, wall plaques, windchimes, lighting, etc. Please send in your ideas. Do you think such decorations are appropriate in an Australian garden?

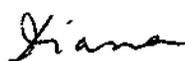
Another topic (raised by the NE Vic Branch) is Australian trees - deciduous or evergreen - for shade. Do you have any ideas or recommendations?

Barbara Buchanan mentioned *Banksia robur* as a valuable plant for a prominent position. (It's one of my favourites too.) We'd like to hear from members suggestions of other Plants recommended as features.

I mentioned in a recent Newsletter (NL27-13) that when we removed two floriferous hybrid grevilleas, all the aggressive Brush (Uttle) Wattlebirds vanished from our back garden. The sequence has been fascinating. Red Wattlebirds were common in *our* garden 25 years ago, before the Brush Wattlebirds arrived, but lately they visited only the front area. Now Red Wattlebirds have returned to the back garden, but they do not drive out smaller birds as the Brush Wattlebirds did. Since then we have frequently seen White-plumed Honeyeaters (Greenies) (once regular inhabitants of the garden), Brown Thornbills, Willie Wagtails and occasionally White-browed Scrubwrens. We've recently seen Eastern Spinebills again - they're seasonal visitors for us. A few Brush Wattlebirds are appearing now, so we'll see what happens next.' The whole experience has been a clear reminder of the effect our plant choice (as part of garden design) can have on the local birdlife. Beautiful Australian plants are not necessarily all benign.

In the Journal of SGAP Canberra Region, March 2000, there is a 5-page article (small pages) on fire mitigation and fire retardant plants. The long list of plants (almost 140) is largely taken from an earlier SGAP Canberra Region Journal (April 1996) and 'Grow What Where'. If you are interested please let me know - I could send complete copies to individual members or include some information in the next NL.

Best wishes from



Diana Snape